
GANZ NOTES - TNS 12, 5 - FIRST LETTER OF JOHN (23 MAY 2023)

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JANE KENYON (1947-1995)

This from Garrison Keillor's *A Writer's Almanac* - the entry from today (23 May 2023):

She translated the work of the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova and converted to Christianity, attending the local Congregational Church. When asked if her newfound faith influenced her writing she answered, "My spiritual life is so much a part of my intellectual life and my feeling life that it's really become impossible for me to keep it out of my work."

Her advice to aspiring writers was: "Tell the whole truth. Don't be lazy, don't be afraid. Close the critic out when you are drafting something new. Take chances in the clarity of emotion."

...

Jane Kenyon said, "Be a good steward of your gifts. Protect your time. Feed your inner life. Avoid too much noise. Read good books, have good sentences in your ears. Be by yourself as often as you can. Walk. Take the phone off the hook. Work regular hours."

ORALITY

MARTHALER ON "KERYGMA"

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**kerygma**" – "Preaching; proclamation of religious truth."

Bernard Marthaler, *The Creed - the Apostolic Faith in Contemporary Theology*. 3d ed. New London, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, [1987 and 1993] 2007.

As to Marthaler's purpose in writing this book, he puts it this way: "As already noted, this work is in part inspired by the effort of the World Council of Churches, through the Commission on Faith and Order, **to bring Christians of all denominations to a common confession of the apostolic faith.**"

From Kerygma to Creed: "On the first Pentecost, Peter with the Eleven was driven by an inner compulsion to proclaim what they had seen and heard and, yes, felt." (Marthaler: 2). **The kerygma is essentially a story:** Who was he? What happened? How did we come to know and understand Jesus? Compare the concreteness expressed in 1 John 1:1-4.

As the story was told and retold, certain essential elements consistently show themselves. See an OT example at Deuteronomy 26:5-9. *When* things happened; how warm the day was; who was present at the time; *where* it happened can all be allowed to go vague, but the *meaning* of the event must stay consistent in each telling of the story ... *otherwise one is not telling the same story.* **This is the abiding difficulty of narrative as principal carrier of meaning: the meaning is too influenced by the teller, too specific to the narrator.**

It is important (Ganz, 17 January 2017) in the kerygmatic telling for the Teller to include **what it feels like** to experience this Story as alive now. In other words, every Story contains within the telling a desire in the Teller **to involve his or her Hearers** in the story. A kerygmatic Teller never just lays out the facts. **The affect the Teller wants to activate in the Hearer is an essential part of the Telling.** Think of Abraham Heschel's great insight about the OT Prophets – how they not only spoke/shared God's words to His people, but they also revealed God's affect.

AN ORAL, NOT A LITERARY, CULTURE

“Modern commentators are often puzzled by the author's failure to appeal to scriptural authority – especially to that of the Fourth Gospel.... Such arguments reflect a typical modern misunderstanding of the oral modes of cognition and authority which were still very much a part of the world of the 1st and 2nd centuries.... For them, real knowledge [vs. abstract modes of cognition] still derived from the oral world of direct fact-to-face communication. **When the New Testament was canonized as a sacred Scripture as a result of the 2nd century struggles with heresy, an important cognitive and religious shift occurs in Christianity: it becomes possible for the foundation of true faith to be associated [not with the religious character and quality of the person orally handing on the tradition] with the interpretation of a sacred text.**” (xviii)

THE AUTHORITY OF TEACHING RESIDES IN THE COMMUNITY

“1 John refers to that memory when he keeps reminding his audience of what they have heard ‘from the beginning’. **In cultures with no written documents at all, the common memory is the custodian of all information, technical skills, social arrangements, legal agreements, and religious traditions. The community is the witness.**” (xix)

WHAT “IDENTICAL ACCOUNTS” MEAN IN AN ORAL CULTURE

“With such things as print, Xerox, and home video cassettes, we require a high degree of correlation between one account and the next before we will say that the two are *identical*. **Studies of oral cultures, on the other hand, indicate that two accounts are considered identical if 50-60% of the words are the same.** Thus, it is possible for a story or a tradition to undergo modification or even be updated to fit the environment of its hearers without its being regarded as ‘changed’.” (xx)

PERSONAL REMEMBRANCE MORE IMPORTANT THAN HAVING TEXTUAL SUPPORT

“Actually, the author's evocation of the common memory and testimony is not the weak argument of a person lacking textual support – as it would today – but the strongest possible appeal within the context of orally constituted tradition and authority. *The testimony of the community is what really counts.*” (xxi)

ORAL TRADITION IS DYNAMIC, FLUID, COMBATIVE TOWARDS OPPONENTS

“Now imagine a world in which that experience of personal, oral debate is common fare. *No value is placed on our standard of impartial objectivity.* The point of rhetoric was to use every means possible to see that one's own position, the true and good one, prevailed over its ‘bad’ opposition.... There is no neutral observer.... Remember that ‘opposition’ is the norm for discussion in a rhetorical climate. **Failure to appreciate the difference between oral culture and its rhetoric and our own ‘detached’ language can lead a modern reader to overestimate the severity of the problem.**” (xxii)

“THE GIFT” BY MARY OLIVER

From *House of Light* (1990) by Mary Oliver (1935-2019)

The Gift

I wanted to thank the mockingbird for the vigor of
his song.
Every day he sang from the rim of the field, while I
picked
 blueberries or just idled in the sun.
Every day he came fluttering by to show me, and why
not,
 the white blossoms in his wings.
So one day I went there with a machine, and played
some songs of
 Mahler.
The mockingbird stopped singing, he came close and
seemed
 to listen.
Now when I go down to the field, a little Mahler spills
 through the sputters of his song.
How happy I am, lounging in the light, listening as
the music
 floats by!
And I give thanks also for my mind, that thought of
giving
 a gift.

And mostly, I'm grateful that I take this world so
seriously.

Mary Oliver

Wikipedia - **Gustav Mahler (German; 7 July 1860 - 18 May 1911)** was an Austro-Bohemian Romantic composer, and one of the leading conductors of his generation. As a composer he acted as a bridge between the 19th-century Austro-German tradition and the Modernism of the early 20th century. While in his lifetime his status as a conductor was established beyond question, his own music gained wide popularity only after periods of relative neglect, which included a ban on its performance in much of Europe during the Nazi era. After 1945 his compositions were rediscovered by a new generation of listeners; Mahler then became one of the most frequently performed and recorded of all composers, a position he has sustained into the 21st century.

OVERVIEW OF THE LETTERS OF JOHN

The Letters of John by Scott M. Lewis, S.J.

INTRODUCTION

The First, Second, and Third Letters of John were written after the Gospel of John, possibly around 100–115 CE. They were written by an anonymous Presbyter, or elder (2 John 1; 3 John 1) and intended for the various house churches comprising the Johannine communion. First John is not written in the style of an ancient letter. Its repetitious and circular nature suggest a homily, possibly intended to be read to the assembled community to which it is addressed. Second and Third John, on the other hand, are short and terse and follow the conventions of ancient letter writing.

The letters are examples of *parenesis*, or moral exhortation. The Presbyter wants not only to encourage and strengthen his fellow believers but also to ensure that they continue to believe and behave in a manner consistent with the faith in which they stand. The three letters were probably written by the same author, although he was not necessarily the author of the Gospel, since the letters differ on some theological points, such as the atoning and expiatory nature of Jesus' death (1 John 1:7; 2:2; 4:10).

Church communities were no different in the first century than they are in the twenty-first; there were problems, disagreements, and divisions. The much idealized view of Christian living presented in chapters 14–17 of the Gospel has given way to human realities, and now the elder who writes these letters must deal with a major crisis. **A serious schism has arisen, and the unity of the communities has been broken (1 John 2:18–27; 4:16; 2 John 7–11). Those who deny Jesus the Christ in any way are antichrists, liars, and false prophets (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:1, 3).**

Additionally, it is apparent that many of the discourses in the Gospel, especially chapters 14–17, are subject to misinterpretation, especially those dealing with sin, Christian living, and the ongoing role of the Spirit. **It appears that some believed that the Spirit was leading them in new directions. The elder seeks to set the record straight.** He reiterates forcefully the essential elements of the Gospel revelation, especially **the importance of the Incarnation**, the love commandment, the Spirit, the nature of sin, and eschatological expectations. The stark contrast between light and darkness, truth and falsehood, love and hate characterizes the letters, reflecting the dualism of the Fourth Gospel and its community. **One stands with light or darkness – there is no middle ground.** Readers wishing to delve into the history of the Johannine

community and its struggles will profit from Raymond Brown's *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*.¹

COMMENTARY

The New Testament in Modern English by J.B Phillips [1906-1982] copyright © 1960, 1972 J. B. Phillips. Administered by The Archbishops' Council of the Church of England. Used by Permission.²

1 John 1 (J.B. Phillips) ¹⁻⁴We are writing to you about something which has always existed yet which we ourselves actually saw and heard: something which we had an opportunity to observe closely and even to hold in our hands, and yet, as we know now, was something of the very Word of life himself! For it was life which appeared before us: we saw it, we are eyewitnesses of it, and are now writing to you about it. It was the very life of all ages, the life that has always existed with the Father, which actually became visible in person to us mortal men. We repeat, we really saw and heard what we are now writing to you about. We want you to be with us in this – in this fellowship with the Father, and Jesus Christ his Son. We must write and tell you about it, because the more that fellowship extends the greater the joy it brings to us who are already in it.

1 John 1: 1-4 - As in the Gospel (1:1), the opening line speaks of the “beginning,” referring here primarily to the revelation of God in Jesus in which the Christian community has placed its faith. **The Word of Life – the *Logos* (John 1:1) – is not some abstraction or concept but was made real and concrete for the world.** It was seen (John 1:39; 14:9; 19:35; 20:18, 25) and touched (John 20:27), signifying that Christ truly came in the flesh (4:2; 2 John 7). Since the author's community has seen and touched the Word of life, his testimony carries weight, and he gives this testimony so that the readers may

¹ Scott M. Lewis, [“The Letters of John,”](#) in *New Testament*, ed. Daniel Durken, The New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 807–808.

² J. B. Phillips was a pastor and author in London. He is best known for *The New Testament in Modern English*, which he translated to aid the younger generation in its understanding of the New Testament.

have fellowship or sharing (*koinonia*) with his community. Fellowship with his community includes the experience of the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son (17:11, 21, and 23) and is the source of complete joy that he wishes for his readers (15:11; 17:13). **Breaking the unity of the community is tantamount to breaking communion with God.**³

AN EXPERIENCE AT CATHEDRAL OF OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS



³ Scott M. Lewis, "[The First Letter of John](#)," in *New Testament*, ed. Daniel Durken, The New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 809.

See: <https://www.olacathedral.org/>. “Of the three tapestry groups, the most prominent is the Communion of Saints along the south and north walls of the nave. Twenty-five fresco-like tapestries depict 135 saints and blessed from around the world, including holy men and women of North America canonized by the Church. Twelve untitled figures, including children of all ages, represent the many anonymous holy people in our midst. All the figures direct our eyes to the light of the great Cross-window above the Altar where the Eucharist is celebrated.”

“The **large stone texture patterns** used in the background of the Communion of Saints are from actual scans of excavations of the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem from the time of the Romans.”

GOD IS LIGHT

This use of “light” can cause us to think of physical light and how it illuminates things that are in the dark. But perhaps what we can best understand here is that God, and in particular the incarnate Son of God, is EXEMPLAR – a luminous model of what it looks like to be a good human being.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**exemplar**” – **1.b.** (a) An abstract or eternally existing pattern, model, or archetype, in relation to which particular things exist as imperfect copies or approximations; *esp.* an archetypal idea of a created thing, as originally existing eternally in the mind of God.

1 John 1 (J. B. Phillips): ⁵⁻¹⁰ Here, then, is the message which we heard from him, and now proclaim to you: GOD IS LIGHT and no shadow of darkness can exist in him. Consequently, if we were to say that we enjoyed fellowship with him and still went on living in darkness, we should be both telling and living a lie. But if we really are living in the same light in which he eternally exists, then we have true fellowship with each other, and the blood which his Son shed for us keeps us clean from all sin. If we refuse to admit that we are sinners, then we live in a world of illusion and truth becomes a stranger to us. But if we freely admit that we have sinned, we find God utterly reliable and straightforward – he forgives our sins and makes us thoroughly clean from all that is evil. For if we take up the attitude “we have not sinned”, we flatly deny God’s diagnosis of our condition and cut ourselves off from what he has to say to us.

Walking in the light does not mean that one is perfect, and it is only realistic to admit that even the best people will sin. Claiming to be sinless when one is not is self-

deception and lying, which is characteristic of Satan in John 8:34, and in so doing we cut ourselves off from God. Acknowledgment of sins results in forgiveness and cleansing, because Jesus is our Advocate with the Father and expiation for both our sins and those of the whole world (1:8–2:3). The reference to the sins of the whole world is a universalistic element that probably draws on John 1:29 and 20:23 and is a welcome counterbalance to the usual Johannine sectarianism. In the Gospel of John the Advocate (Paraclete) refers to the Spirit, while here it is applied to Jesus.⁴

1 John 1:5 to 2:2 – The core of the message is verse 5: *God is light*, and in him there is no darkness at all. **Light must be understood in the ethical sense.** Jesus revealed the God whom no one had ever seen (John 1:18). Hatred, violence, greed, selfishness, and so on are alien to God; when they are attributed to God, they are a human projection. This is connected to the statement that God is love (4:8–9), demonstrated by his revelation in Jesus and the expiation of our sins.⁵

A PROBLEM: ETHICS AND MORALITY

I find it helpful to make a distinction between Ethics and Morality.

Morality is being able to come to clarity about what the goodness and badness of persons is. So, for example, one is not automatically a good person because he or she is ethical. And conversely, one who is ethical is not automatically a good person. The way to become moral is to have demonstrated – **incarnate value** – in a person or persons what genuine goodness looks like, does, cares about, hopes, and suffers. **We become moral (and immoral) primarily through imitation, or through the pressure of good and bad people around us.** The First Letter of John is about **the moral formation of the Christian community**; it is not about *rules*, and it is not about censuring the behavior of other Christians. The author continuously focuses his readers/hearers on the incarnate example of Jesus Christ: on **what a good human being is and does and hopes and dreams and suffers.** “The real deal” as my Grandpa Frohoff used to say.

Recall the example of “the **Pharisees**” who essentially a moral reality into an intricate ethical reality. They demonstrated (an all who are like them through all of history) how it was possible to ethically scrupulous and yet, in Jesus’ assessment of them, to be

⁴ Scott M. Lewis, [“The First Letter of John,”](#) in *New Testament*, ed. Daniel Durken, The New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 810.

⁵ Scott M. Lewis, [“The First Letter of John,”](#) in *New Testament*, ed. Daniel Durken, The New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 809.

“whitened sepulchers” who looks great on the outside but who hold “dead men’s bones” – corruption within them.

Ethics is a set of agreed-upon *norms* of “proper” conduct, which a particular society (such as American society) agrees are normative for/in the conduct of its citizenry, normative in relation to our ability as citizens to praise or censure particular citizens or groups. In this realm of meaning, **right and wrong behaviors** is what is foremost.

Sub-societies within a society can have their own ethical norms; for example, “What is good for General Motors is good for America”. Think of more exclusive kinds of Clubs that require its members to act in particular ways, and who will be censured if they choose not to abide by those *rules*. Sometimes, then, a sub-society, or even a whole society (such as American society), may compel an ethical code that, in fact, makes its people not good people. Consider the mafia, which operates by a strict code of conduct.

Such ethical norms start to become impossibly complex when a society (such as American society today) overly concentrates on the “rights” of *kinds* of American persons, rather than grounding such norms in a common understanding of what “an American” means. For an “ethics” of a society to work it must get to a level of generalization that encompasses everyone generally (i.e., not to exclude *kinds* of people in the process – races, ethnicities, etc. – but incorporates all into a coherent pattern).

TO OBEY AND THAT LOVE IS THE PROOF OF LIFE

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**to obey**” – 2.b. *transitive*. To submit to, act in accordance with, or follow (a principle, legitimate authority, law, etc.).

Etymology of the “ob-” prefix: < classical Latin *ob* (also *op* in inscriptions) in the direction of, towards, against, in the way of, in front of, in view of, on account of (of uncertain origin). This Latin preposition is followed by the accusative.

Etymology: < Anglo-Norman *obeir, obeier, obbeir, obbeyer, abeir* and Old French, Middle French *obeir* (12th cent.; French *obéir*) < classical Latin *oboedire* (also *obēdire*) to listen, pay attention, obey, submit to < *ob-* [ob- prefix](#) + *audire* to hear (see [audit n.](#)).

1 John 2 (J.B. Phillips) –

³⁻⁶It is only when we obey God’s laws that we can be quite sure that we really know him. The man who claims to know God but does not obey his laws is not

only a liar but lives in self-delusion. In practice, the more a man learns to obey God's laws the more truly and fully does he express his love for him. Obedience is the test of whether we really live "in God" or not. The life of a man who professes to be living in God must bear the stamp of Christ.

⁷⁻¹¹ I am not really writing to tell you of any new command, brothers of mine. It is the old, original command which you had at the beginning; it is the old message which you have heard before. And yet as I give it to you again I know that it is true – in your life as it was in his. For the darkness is beginning to lift and the true light is now shining in the world. Anyone who claims to be "in the light" and hates his brother is, in fact, still in complete darkness. The man who loves his brother lives and moves in the light, and has no reason to stumble. But the man who hates his brother is shut off from the light and gropes his way in the dark without seeing where he is going. To move in the dark is to move blindfold.

1 John 2:3-11 – The litmus test for knowing Jesus is simple: anyone claiming to do so must keep his commandments (v. 3) and **live just as Jesus lived** (v. 6). *Knowing God has nothing to do with intellectual or factual knowledge but is a deep and personal relationship.* If God is love, then those claiming to know God must manifest this love in their lives. With a backward glance at the "new" commandment in John 13:34, the author admits that it is not new, but a very old commandment, whose origins stretch back to the creation, and which has been proclaimed anew (v. 7) by Jesus. It is an eschatological commandment; the new age of light is dawning, and the darkness is passing away. **The true light (see John 1:9) – Jesus and the community of believers – is already shining (v. 8).** *Walking in the light* is equated with loving one's brother or sister; the one who does that is in the light and will not fall, while the one hating his brother truly walks in darkness (vv. 8-11).⁶

TAUGHT BY GOD – THE SPIRIT

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the adverb "**continually**" – **1. a.** In a continual way; always, incessantly, constantly, perpetually, all the time; i.e. either: Without any intermission, at every moment, continuously (in time); or less strictly: With frequent repetition, very frequently. (Cf. [continual adj. 1.](#))

⁶ Scott M. Lewis, "[The First Letter of John,](#)" in *New Testament*, ed. Daniel Durken, The New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 810.

And in *Garner's Modern English Usage*, 5th ed. (2022) – “*Continual* (= frequently recurring; intermittent) typically involves breaks.... *Continuous* (= occurring without interruption; unceasing) involves no breaks at all.”

John now reverts to his cycle of tests, expanding and enforcing them: **the moral test of obedience** or righteousness (2:28–3:10), **the social test of love** (3:11–18) and, after a digression about the relation between our assurance and our condemning heart (3:19–24), **the doctrinal test of truth** concerning Christ (4:1–6).⁷

1 John 2:26-28 (J.B. Phillips) – ²⁶⁻²⁸ It is true that I felt I had to write the above about men who would dearly love to lead you astray. Yet I know that the touch of his Spirit never leaves you, and you don't really need a human teacher. You know that his Spirit teaches you about all things, always telling you the truth and never telling you a lie. So, as he has taught you, live continually in him. Yes, now, little children remember to live continually in him. So that if he were suddenly to reveal himself, we should still know exactly where we stand, and should not have to shrink away from his presence.

The moral test again comes first. The proof of being a Christian is not merely orthodoxy, but *righteous conduct* as well. This time, in unfolding the moral test, John associates it closely with the Lord's 'manifestations' or 'appearings'. The thought of manifestation, either as a noun, adjective or verb, occurs in this passage six times, four of which refer to Christ, two to his future appearing which is treated first (2:28–3:2) and two to his past appearing (3:5, 8; cf. 1:2). Such, then, is the theme of this paragraph. **Unrighteous conduct is unthinkable in the Christian who has grasped the purpose of the two appearings of Christ.** The fact of his first appearing and the hope of his second are both strong incentives to holiness.⁸

THE DEVIL – “NO TRUTH IN HIM”

Additional note: John's teaching about the devil (3:8, 10)

⁷ John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 119.

⁸ John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 120.

John assumes the existence of the devil, and writes of his origin, activity, power and overthrow.

1. *His origin.* John 8:44 describes him as 'not holding to the truth'. This seems to indicate a fall from the truth in which he once 'stood' (rv), in which case the following clause, 'for there is no truth in him', indicates not why he fell, but how we know that he fell. The explanation of his present lack of truth is that he fell from the truth long ago. For a similar use of *hoti* see Luke 7:47. Twice the expression 'from the beginning' (*ap' archēs*) is used of the devil (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8). If we are right to interpret the clause 'not holding to the truth' as referring to his fall from the condition in which he was created, then his murderous and evil activity must be dated from the 'beginning', not of his existence, but of his fallen career. 'He is the aboriginal sinner; and what he became he still is' (Law).

2. *His activity* is constantly malevolent because he is by nature 'the evil one'. This title was used by our Lord (e.g. Matt. 6:13) and six times by John (John 17:15; 1 John 2:13, 14; 3:12; 5:18, 19). The devil's evil work belongs particularly to three spheres, in which are seen his complete lack of righteousness, love and truth, and which correspond to the three tests which John applies in his first letter. First, he 'has been sinning from the beginning' (1 John 3:8) and tempts others into sin (cf. Matt. 6:13). He is, in fact, so certainly the origin of all sin that it may be said: 'he who does what is sinful is of the devil' (1 John 3:8). Secondly, he is 'a murderer' (John 8:44). Thus Cain, in killing his brother Abel, gave evidence of his diabolical origin (1 John 3:12). So did the Jews who sought to kill Jesus (John 8:40–41). Foiled in his assault upon Jesus, the devil now persecutes the church (Rev. 12:4–6, 13–17). He is called 'the destroyer' (Rev. 9:11; cf. Heb. 2:14). Thirdly, the devil is 'a liar and the father of lies' (John 8:44). This is due to the fact we have already noted that he fell from the truth and 'there is no truth in him'. Consequently, he both accuses the people of God (Rev. 12:10), being their adversary (the meaning of the Hebrew word *Satan*) and a slanderer (the meaning of the Greek word *diabolos*), and seeks to deceive them into error by the lies of false prophets (cf. 1 John 2:21–22; 4:2).

3. *His power* is considerable, as is plain from his widespread, malicious activity. It is not just that he is able to insinuate evil thoughts and designs into the minds of human beings (John 13:2; cf. Luke 22:3; Matt. 8:33), and even enter into them himself personally (John 13:27), but that 'the one who is in the world' (1 John 4:4) is 'the prince (lit. "ruler", *archōn*) of this world' (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; cf. 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:12). He rules from a 'throne' (Rev. 2:13), and his dominion is so extensive that 'the whole world is under the

RV Revised Version, 1884.

Law Robert Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St John* (1909; Baker, 1968).

control of the evil one' (1 John 5:19). Indeed, the unredeemed are said to be not only *under*, but *of*, the devil. He is their 'father' and they his 'children' (John 8:44; 1 John 3:10). Phrases such as these express the real and terrible influence which the evil one has over people's lives, so that they are motivated by and succumb to his desires (John 8:44; cf. 2 Tim 2:26). Their will is to do his will.

4. *His overthrow* began with the arrival of the Son of God, whom the devil had 'no hold' on (John 14:30). The express purpose of his appearing was to 'destroy the devil's work' (1 John 3:8). This he accomplished supremely by his death and resurrection. The emphatic repetition of 'now' in relation to the judgment of this world and the driving out of its ruler (John 12:31) refers in the context to the hour of the Son of Man's glorification (John 12:23, 27). In anticipation of that hour Jesus could say both that the ruler of this world 'now stands condemned' (John 16:11, translating *kekritai*, perfect tense) and that as a result he would draw all people to himself (John 12:32). It may be to this preliminary downfall that the binding of Satan refers (Rev. 20:1ff.; cf. Mark 3:27). So far, however, his overthrow has been a dethronement rather than a decisive destruction. His final defeat will not take place until the last day (Rev. 20:10). Meanwhile, it is possible for the Father to 'protect' his people from the evil one. So Jesus prayed (John 17:15), and John affirms that, because those who are born of God are 'kept safe' (the verb is *tērein* again) by 'the one who was born of God', the evil one does not even 'touch' them (1 John 5:18). It is, of course, by this power of Christ and by the Word of God that the young men can be said to 'have overcome the evil one' (1 John 2:13-14; cf. 4:4).⁹

FALSE TEACHERS & TEACHING

1 John 4 (J.B. Phillips) -

¹⁻³ Don't trust every spirit, dear friends of mine, but test them to discover whether they come from God or not. For the world is full of false prophets. You can test them in this simple way: every spirit that acknowledges the fact that Jesus Christ actually became man, comes from God, but the spirit which denies this fact does not come from God. The latter comes from the anti-christ, which you were warned would come and which is already in the world.

⁴⁻⁶ You, my children, who belong to God have already defeated this spirit, because the one who lives in you is far stronger than the anti-Christ in the world.

⁹ John R. W. Stott, [*The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 19 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 139-141.

The agents of the anti-christ are children of the world, they speak the world's language and the world, of course, pays attention to what they say. We are God's children and only the man who knows God hears our message; what we say means nothing to the man who is not himself a child of God. This gives us a ready means of distinguishing the true from the false.

In a Spirit-filled, charismatic community, the question of the discernment of spirits is extremely important. **In our own time the failure to exercise discernment in cases of the claims of charismatic leaders has often resulted in tragedy.** All sorts of things can be said under the seeming influence of the Spirit by many different people, a problem faced in 1 Corinthians 12:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:11–22, and Revelation 2:2. In John 14:26 and 16:13, a teaching function is ascribed to the Spirit, and many of the author's opponents appear to have taken that very seriously.

By what standard can their accuracy be measured? The author warns his audience to be wary and to test the spirits, since so many false prophets have gone out into the world, certainly referring to his opponents (v. 1). **In Deuteronomy 13:1–5 and 18:20–22, the false prophet is one who speaks the names of unknown gods.** In a similar vein, those spirits that acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh belong to God, while those not doing so are the spirit of the antichrist (vv. 2–3). *Fidelity to the primal revelation is crucial.* The emphasis on “come in the flesh” (v. 2) might indicate that some were denying the salvific value of the humanity or “flesh” of Jesus. **The full incarnation of the Word (Logos) is manifested in the human and social sphere in care for the poor and the weak and the needs of others – in other words, in concrete acts of love.**

It is obvious to the author that those who do not acknowledge Jesus belong to the world, **for the world eagerly accepts their teachings,** while *the truth concerning Jesus is a sign of contradiction and an occasion of opposition from the world (vv. 4–5).* The writer claims that “we,” meaning his community, belong to God, as does anyone who listens to them, while those who do not belong to God refuse to do so. This is a question of the correct interpretation of the Christian revelation and message, and the author takes the correctness of his community's proclamation as his point of departure. **The spirit of truth he equates with the stance of his community, while the spirit of deceit describes his opponents.** In an intriguing parallel, the Qumran community believed in the opposition of two spirits, truth and injustice (1QS 3:13–20), while deceit or falsehood was the characteristic of those opposed to God.¹⁰

¹⁰ Scott M. Lewis, [“The First Letter of John,”](#) in *New Testament*, ed. Daniel Durken, The New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 813–814.

Recall here Jesus's conversation with **Nicodemus in John 3**:^{19*} And this is the verdict,ⁿ that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil.²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed.^o²¹ But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.^p¹¹

* Judgment is not only future but is partially realized here and now.

ⁿ 1:5, 9-11; 8:12; 9:5.

^o Jb 24:13-17.

^p Gn 47:29 LXX; Jos 2:14 LXX; 2 Sm 2:6 LXX; 15:20 LXX; Tb 4:6 LXX; 13:6; Is 26:10 LXX; Mt 5:14-16.

¹¹ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Jn 3:19-21.

OVERVIEW - "The Letters of John" in The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible

Authored by Margaret M. Mitchell, "[John, Letters Of](#)," *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009) 370–373.

JOHN, LETTERS OF

Three NT writings bear the traditional titles First, Second, and Third Letters of John. None of the three claims to be written by JOHN, and only 2 and 3 John employ the LETTER form. Collectively, these three writings have some relationship to one another and perhaps to the Gospel of John (see JOHN, GOSPEL OF; less likely to Revelation [see REVELATION, BOOK OF]), and hence are called the "Johannine Letters."

- A. Canonicity and Corpus
 - B. Authorship and Location
 - C. Literary Genre
 - D. Historical Context
 - E. Theological Stance and Legacy
- Bibliography

A. Canonicity and Corpus

It is not clear that the three letters formed a separate collection before being included in the twenty-seven-book NT canon as we find it in Athanasius's Festal Letter of 367

CE (see CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT).

The first and longest letter had a wider early readership; Eusebius (early 4th cent.) includes among the **homologoumena** (ὁμολογούμενα), or universally recognized books, "the letter of John circulated as the 'former' " (elsewhere Eusebius calls it **katholikē** [καθολική], "general") and says that "the letters named the second and third of John" are among the **antilegomena** (ἀντιλεγόμενα), or disputed books (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25.2–3).

In their canonical context, the Johannine Letters are presented as apostolic writings alongside those from James, Peter (two documents), and Jude. These seven documents constitute a collection known since the 4th cent. as the CATHOLIC EPISTLES, formed on the analogy of the Pauline Epistles, which had been circulating as a corpus in some form already by the end of the 1st cent. Unlike modern English Bibles (which follow the Latin Vulgate translation), in most extant Gk. manuscripts of the whole NT these Catholic Epistles are placed between the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles of Paul. This literary suspension bridge is meant to foster the impression (from a later vantage point) of a unified apostolic Christian faith in the first generation.

B. Authorship and Location

The canonical context of these letters presupposes a determination about apostolic authorship that the documents do not explicitly claim. Already in antiquity it

was noted that none of the three (nor the Fourth Gospel) bears the name of "John" (see the 3rd-cent. testimony of Dionysius of Alexandria, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.7–11). The NT book that does, Revelation (see 1:1, 4, 9), gave rise to disputes already in the 3rd cent. about the identity of that John, and his relationship (if any) to the disciple of Jesus by that name (the son of Zebedee [Mark 1:19; 3:17; 10:35; compare Acts 12:2; Gal 2:9]), as well as to the Gospel and letters attributed to a "John."

Second and Third John are first-person documents from the pen of "the elder" (**ho presbyteros** ὁ πρεσβύτερος). This figure presents himself as a teacher who exercises authority, predominantly through letter writing (2 John 5, 12; 3 John 9), but also through the possibility (real or fictional) of following up the letter with a visit (see 2 John 12; 3 John 10, 13). The author does not give any other autobiographical information. Whether the term *elder* is to be taken simply as "older man" or as an ecclesiastical title (as in 1 Tim 5:17) cannot be determined.

The author of 1 John, equally silent on his individual identity, begins in the plural as a representative of collective or traditional religious authority ("what we have heard ..." [1:1]), but then he adopts a singular voice starting in 2:1, to addressees he characterizes as children, a posture consistent with the "elder" of the other two missives ("My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin" [**teknia** (τεκνία) in 2:1; see also 2:28; 3:7; 4:4; 5:21; compare John 13:33]; 2 and 3 John use **tekna** [τέκνα], "children," in 2 John 1, 4, 13; 3 John 4).

The literary pose of a parental figure giving counsel and admonition to children is something all three documents have in common. But the ubiquity of this stance in ancient letters of advice, and Christian ones in particular (e.g., Paul in 1 Cor 4:14), makes historical identification of any writer on this basis alone impossible.

Nor can we discern an author or a precise historical location from the contents. The letters do not include a single geographical reference, though tradition places the apostle John, and writings attributed to him, in Ephesus. Third John, alone among the letters, mentions some persons by name: Gaius is the recipient (v. 1), Diotrephes the author's nemesis (vv. 9–10), and Demetrius the object of his recommendation (v. 12). But these are common names, and any identification with others in the NT bearing them is improbable (compare Acts 19:23, 28, 29; 20:4; Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14). Second John contains no personal names, but an elusive "elect lady" (**eklektē kyria** ἐκλεκτὴ κυρία) who is the epistolary recipient (together with "her children"). She probably represents the church (**ekklēsia** ἐκκλησία) here, as in the final verse of the letter (v. 13). It is possible, though less likely, that she is a real Christian woman who is host of a church in her home (compare Prisca in 1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3); but, given her anonymity, even this conjecture does not add much to our search for the author of the letter or its setting.

Since it is not possible to verify the historical identity and ecclesial position of the writer externally, research has largely focused on evidence of internal literary

relationships among the documents. The similarities in theology, forms of expression, and vocabulary are indeed striking, though there is not a complete overlap. For example, 2 and 3 John use the phrase “walking in the truth” (2 John 4; 3 John 3–4) whereas 1 John speaks of “walking in the light” (see 1 John 1:7; compare 2:6). To account for both the commonalities and differences, scholars have posited theories of common authorship, on the one hand, and literary borrowing by different authors, on the other. Second and Third John seem to come from the same pen, as they adopt largely the same literary form, vocabulary, and concerns, and the authorial designation as “the elder.” But there is debate about whether that same person wrote 1 John, or if whoever penned the shorter missives wrote under its influence (or vice versa).

Most attention of all has been paid to the question of whether the author of 1 John also wrote the Gospel of John. The obvious congruities (Dionysius aptly said they “have the same hue” [Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.22]) are by some attributed to common authorship, and by others to literary dependency of the author of 1 John on the Gospel (e.g., compare 1 John 5:1 and John 20:31, or 1 John 3:16 and John 15:13).

Close comparisons suggest that the four documents stand in a common tradition; direct literary dependence of 1 John on the Gospel of John seems most likely, since it mimics that work’s famous prologue with a shorthand version of its own that is based on a kind of literary inclusio formed by John 1:1–18 and 20:24–31. The same is

true for 3 John, because of the apparent play on John 19:35 in v. 12. Second John has so many echoes reverberating with 1 John that it may have been composed on the basis of it (observe what may be an epitome or summary of 1 John 4:1–3 in 2 John 7).

If this is the case, such literary rewritings and retellings may be better accounted for by recasting the quest for an individual author into an idea of a “**Johannine school**” that operated out of a common literary heritage, extending it in new ways. On balance we are left with the observation (noted already by Dionysius [Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.11]) that, in contrast with the other “John” who wrote Revelation, anonymity is a characteristic trait of this body of texts. That feature notwithstanding, their focus is on “testimony” communicated by a reliable chain of (unnamed) witnesses brought forward from times past (“from the beginning,” 1 John 1:1; 2:7, 13, 14; 3:8, 11; 2 John 5, 6) for reuse in a present time that is defined by readers.

C. Literary Genre

A **literary genre** is a contract of common expectations between an author and readers that is constructed at the intersection of form, content, and function.

In the case of 2 and 3 John we appear to be on relatively sure ground. These two short works are textbook cases of ancient Gk. letters, containing the following formulas: 1) epistolary prescript (though lacking a greeting in 3 John); 2) health wish (2 John 4; 3 John 2–4); 3) letter body, with

request formula and argument (2 John 5–11; 3 John 5–12); 4) a partial or embedded letter of recommendation (not in 2 John, though 10–11 is a kind of “anti-recommendation”; 3 John 12, with Johannine styling [compare John 19:35]); 5) closing, with stereotypical formulas about epistolary limits and personal presence (2 John 12; 3 John 13–14); and 6) greetings (2 John 13; 3 John 15).

But despite the overall regularity of epistolary forms, crucial questions remain unresolved: are these real letters, or literary fictions? Does the epistolary form of these two missives represent independent Christian appropriation of Gk. letter-writing formulas by later missionaries? Or does it show contact with an earlier Christian epistolary culture, emanating from the Pauline mission (compare the very similar opening greeting in 2 John 3 and the pseudepigraphical Paulines, 1 Tim 1:2 and 2 Tim 1:2). This association would be more likely if the Johannine Letters have historical links to the letters of Ignatius, who surely knew some collection of Paul’s letters.

First John, on the other hand, has none of these epistolary formulas. Scholars have proposed a range of generic designations for it: ethical exhortation, religious tractate, homily, treatise, encyclical letter, etc. Yet despite the lack of epistolary prescript or other formulas, 1 John employs authorial expressions that have an epistolary ring, esp. the refrain “I am writing to you” (2:1, 7, 8, 12–14, 21, 26; 5:13; compare 1:4), and the use of vocatives such as “children” (see §B), “brothers and sisters” (3:13), and “beloved” (2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11). **Deliberate mimicking of the style of**

the Gospel may point to its purpose: a “primer” on how to read (and how not to read) the Gospel, with distinctive emphases on ethics and christology: the proper reception of the love command among and for the believers and against “the world” (2:3–17; 3:11–5:4), and the right confession that Jesus, as Son of God, had a genuine fleshly existence (4:2–3, 15; 5:5–10). First John has more developed arguments than 2 or 3 John, by which the author sets before the audience a pair of mutually exclusive options: to side with the author or with those who “went out from us” (2:19). The form of argumentation often includes harsh antithetical rhetoric, including charging his adversaries with diabolic origin (3:8) and affiliation with the “antichrist” (4:3). Scholars have debated whether this bitter invective is the focal point of the author’s concern or a side issue, whether it actually corresponds with some historical situation, or is largely rhetorical artifice. But the dualism in the letter is undeniable, and the author’s concern with common fellowship (**koinōnia** κοινωνία)-on his terms and with his group-is signaled from the outset (1:3–4, 6), so this opposing front cannot be incidental to the author’s purpose. Yet historical reconstruction of the teachings or practices of those other Christians based on the author’s denunciations (which make no attempt at neutral description) is acutely difficult.

D. Historical Context

Second and Third John presume a missionary context in which envoys and letters circulate among house churches, and solidarity or conflict are expressed in the act of

providing or withholding hospitality for traveling teachers (2 John 10–11; 3 John 5–10).

This was accurately seen by Byzantine commentators (Ps-Oecumenius, Theophylact, as preserved in the *catenae*, or chain-commentaries), who described 3 John as a letter about hospitality. Letters are assumed to be a key ingredient of ecclesial life, and a medium for introduction and recommendation (3 John 12), as well as instruction and warnings against dangerous intruders (2 John 7–8). The letters do not attempt to supply complete details, but assume the recipients know from elsewhere (John's Gospel) the deeper sense of terms like love, the truth, **ho diabolos** (ὁ διάβολος; "the adversary/slanderer"), "the name," "the teaching of Christ," or "the new commandment." Third John in particular evidences a conflict between "the elder" and "Diotrephes," who, its author says, "likes to put himself first," and "expels ... from the church" the fellow believers and those who wish to welcome them (3 John 9–10). Some have sought here, despite the absence of the term **episkopos** (ἐπίσκοπος; "overseer" or "bishop"), the roots of the monarchical episcopate, the institution of a single powerful bishop in one region, a development seen in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, ca. 117 (see esp. his *Ephesians*). Historical uncertainty about these ecclesiastical particulars is signaled by the fact that scholars have disagreed over whether the "bishop" who sought such primacy here was the elder or Diotrephes.

A major historiographic quandary is whether or how the hospitality disputes involving Diotrephes in 3 John (vv. 9–

10) are related to the "doctrinal" disputes evident in 1 and 2 John concerning whether Christ had "come in the flesh" (1 John 4:1–3). Second John 9–11 connects reception of traveling teachers with acceptance of their **didachē** (διδαχή), "teaching," and v. 7 of the same writing indicates that the teaching leads to a "confession" (**homologeō** ὁμολογέω) the author deems christologically deficient, because it entails a denial that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." Here, too, a par. with Ignatius of Antioch is often invoked, for he warned his epistolary recipients of people who thought Christ only "seemed" (**dokeō** δοκέω) to suffer (Ign. *Trall.* 10; Ign. *Smyrn.* 2–7).

In the late 2nd and 3rd cents., this "heresy" of so-called "**Docetists**" (compare Hippolytus, *Haer.* 8.2, 8, 11 and Serapion of Antioch [in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.12.6])) was identified with Marcionite and gnostic groups and condemned by "orthodox" writers, such as Irenaeus and Tertullian (see DOCETISM). It is hard to know if the adversaries of 1 and 2 John, who are not termed "docetists," per se, represent (in hindsight) a harbinger or (in reality) an actual living link to 2nd-cent. gnostic movements (see GNOSTICISM), esp. that of Cerinthus (see Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.4 for an anecdote from Polycarp that casts Cerinthus against the evangelist John).

Dating of the Johannine Letters can only be established in relation to two other dates: the composition of the Gospel (if the letters assume it), and their earliest attestation (in Pol. *Phil.* 7.1//1 John 4:2–3; 3:8; 2 John 7; Polycarp's letter is dated ca. 117–120 [see POLYCARP, EPISTLE OF]). **If John's Gospel was composed ca. 90–100 CE then 1**

John and possibly the others belong to the decades between 90 CE and 120 CE. Scholars have attempted to determine the order of composition of the three letters, with differing results, some postulating that 2 and 3 John were written first, and others defending the canonical order as more plausible.

E. Theological Stance and Legacy

Like the Gospel of John, these three letters are filled with dualistic formulations that associate the faith of the community with light, truth, and love, whereas those who are outside, in "the world," live in darkness, falsehood, and hate. Their logic of utter incompatibility is absolute.

The love of God, revealed in the sending of his only begotten Son (1 John 4:9–10; compare John 3:16), is available in the community of "beloved" who, "abiding" in God (who "is love," 1 John 4:16) imitate God's love in fulfilling the new/old commandment (1 John 2:7–8) Jesus had given in his farewell discourses in the Gospel (John 13:34) to "love one another" (1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11).

Love is the basis for the self-understanding of the **ekklēsia** as an epiphanic community, the locus in which the unseen God manifestly dwells in love brought to perfection (1 John 4:11–21; 2 John 5–6; 3 John 6). Love in the present not only points forward to the impending *eschaton*, canceling out fear of condemnation (1 John 4:17–18), but it also (paradoxically) points backward to true believers' own divine origins ("born of God," 5:1), the basis of the claim both to be, and to be found at the final

judgment, a child of God (4:4–7; compare 3:2; John 1:12). But this love is not for all people or all things; love for those of “the world” is expressly excluded (1 John 2:15).

Accordingly, the burden falls on the community to “**test the spirits**” (1 John 4:1) as to which are from God and which, since they are given voice by false prophets, must be from the devil (3:8). Consistent with this more cosmological division of humanity, 2 and 3 John give concrete commands that those within this proper circle of right confession (of Jesus Christ as Son of God, come in the flesh) are to be embraced, welcomed, and supported in their mission; others are not even to be greeted, let alone taken in or engaged in dialogue (2 John 10–11).

The security of the community depends upon keeping a high wall between it and the outside world (including those who have departed from the circle, as in 1 John 2:19; 2 John 7). Believers are to rely on the voice of the anonymous authorial elder who delivered solemn (if broadly vague) dicta and decisions about who is true and who false, what teaching is trustworthy and what corrosive.

The history of reception of these letters has seen the cycle of self- and other-definition repeated, **and the roles of boundary police** played out in each new generation of “elders” and those they deem the “Diotrephes” of their day.

Hence the ironic inheritance of the Johannine Letters, and 1 John in particular, in Christian history has been a ready

incorporation of both poles of their dualistic worldview: **their fervent emphasis on love for fellow insiders and demonization of opponents as antichrists and children of the devil (2:18; 4:3).**

This is clearly expressed in Augustine's homilies on the letter (with the enigmatic title *In epistulam Johannis ad Parthos tractatus* [*Tractates on the First Epistle of John*], which has never been satisfactorily explained). These ten sermons, delivered in 407 CE, join Augustine's powerful Latin rhetoric with the simple elegance of the pleas for centrality of the love command found in the letter, while at the same time finding a way to accuse the Donatists—who do confess Jesus as Lord—of being anti-christs (see esp. *Hom.* 3.7–9).

The innovative term *antichrist*, which makes its first appearance in the Johannine Letters (1 John 4:3; 2 John 7), is, alongside love, the major legacy of the letter, with a long and imaginative history of reuse and representation down to the present (see ANTICHRIST).

The Johannine Letters, with their incontrovertibly dualistic outlook, continue to leave Christian readers on the horns of a dilemma: Can one take the stirring exhortations to live as a community of love, light, truth, and integrity out of the sectarian, combative framework in which they are here set?

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cent. century

Hist. eccl. Historia ecclesiastica; Church History

cent. century

cent. century

cent. century

Hist. eccl. Historia ecclesiastica; Church History

cent. century

Hist. eccl. Historia ecclesiastica; Church History

Hist. eccl. Historia ecclesiastica; Church History

ca. circa

par. parallel

Ign. Ignatius, *To the Trallians*

Trall. Ignatius, *To the Trallians*

Ign. Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans*

Smyrn. Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans*

Haer. Refutatio omnium haeresium; Refutation of All Heresies (Philosophoumena)

Hist. eccl. Historia ecclesiastica; Church History

cent. century

Haer. Adversus haereses; Against Heresies

Pol. Polycarp, *To the Philippians*

Phil. Polycarp, *To the Philippians*

ca. circa

ca. circa

Hom. De Homero (Or. 53); Homer

AB Anchor Bible

trans. translator, translated by

JBL Journal of Biblical Literature

SP Sacra pagina

trans. translator, translated by

Margaret M. Mitchell, "[John, Letters Of,](#)" *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009) 370–373.

TEXTS (J. B. Phillips) - The Night School, Series 12, 5 on 23 May 2023

THE J.B. PHILLIPS translation

J.B. Phillips New Testament (PHILLIPS)

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1 John 1:1-10

1 1-4 We are writing to you about something which has always existed yet which we ourselves actually saw and heard: something which we had an opportunity to observe closely and even to hold in our hands, and yet, as we know now, was something of the very Word of life himself! For it was life which appeared before us: we saw it, we are eye-witnesses of it, and are now writing to you about it. It was the very life of all ages, the life that has always existed with the Father, which actually became visible in person to us mortal men. We repeat, we really saw and heard what we are now writing to you about. We want you to be with us in this—in this fellowship with the Father, and Jesus Christ his Son. We must write and tell you about it, because the more that fellowship extends the greater the joy it brings to us who are already in it.

Experience of living "in the light"

5-10 Here, then, is the message which we heard from him, and now proclaim to you: GOD IS LIGHT and no shadow of darkness can exist in him. Consequently, if we were to say that we enjoyed fellowship with him and still went on living in darkness, we should be both telling and living a lie. But if we really are living in the same light in which he eternally exists, then we have true fellowship with each other, and the blood which his Son shed for us keeps us clean from all sin. If we refuse to admit that we are sinners, then we live in a world of illusion and truth becomes a stranger to us. But if we freely admit that we have sinned, we find God utterly reliable and straightforward—he forgives our sins and makes us thoroughly clean from all that is evil. For if we take up the attitude “we have not sinned”, we flatly deny God’s diagnosis of our condition and cut ourselves off from what he has to say to us.

1 John 2:3-11 - “to obey” and that LOVE is the proof

3-6 It is only when we obey God’s laws that we can be quite sure that we really know him. The man who claims to know God but does not obey his laws is not only a liar but lives in self-delusion. In practice, the more a man learns to obey God’s laws the more truly and fully does he express his love for him. Obedience is the test of whether we really live “in God” or not. The life of a man who professes to be living in God must bear the stamp of Christ.

7-11 I am not really writing to tell you of any new command, brothers of mine. It is the old, original command which you had at the beginning; it is the old message which you have heard before. And yet as I give it to you again I know that it is true—in your life as it was in his. For the darkness is beginning to lift and the true light is now shining in the world. Anyone who claims to be “in the light” and hates his brother is, in fact, still in complete darkness. The man who loves his brother lives and moves in the light, and has no reason to stumble. But the man who hates his brother is shut off from the light and gropes his way in the dark without seeing where he is going. To move in the dark is to move blindfold.

1 John 4

I repeat my warning against false teaching

4 1-3 Don't trust every spirit, dear friends of mine, but test them to discover whether they come from God or not. For the world is full of false prophets. You can test them in this simple way: every spirit that acknowledges the fact that Jesus Christ actually became man, comes from God, but the spirit which denies this fact does not come from God. The latter comes from the anti-christ, which you were warned would come and which is already in the world.

4-6 You, my children, who belong to God have already defeated this spirit, because the one who lives in you is far

stronger than the anti-Christ in the world. The agents of the anti-christ are children of the world, they speak the world's language and the world, of course, pays attention to what they say. We are God's children and only the man who knows God hears our message; what we say means nothing to the man who is not himself a child of God. This gives us a ready means of distinguishing the true from the false.

Let us love: God has shown us love at its highest

7-8 To you whom I love I say, let us go on loving one another, for love comes from God. Every man who truly loves is God's son and has some knowledge of him. But the man who does not love cannot know him at all, for God is love.

9-10 To us, the greatest demonstration of God's love for us has been his sending his only Son into the world to give us life through him. We see real love, not in that fact that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to make personal atonement for our sins.

11 If God loved us as much as that, surely we, in our turn, should love each other!

12-13 It is true that no human being has ever had a direct vision of God. Yet if we love each other God does actually live within us, and his love grows in us towards perfection. And, as I wrote above, the guarantee of our living in him and his living in us is the share of his own Spirit which he gives us.

Knowing Christ means more love and confidence, less and less fear

14-16a We ourselves are eye-witnesses able and willing to testify to the fact that the Father did send the Son to save the world. Everyone who acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God lives in him, and he lives in God. So we have come to know and trust the love God has for us.

16b-18 God is love, and the man whose life is lived in love does, in fact, live in God, and God does, in fact, live in him. So our love for him grows more and more, filling us with complete confidence for the day when he shall judge all men—for we realise that our life in this world is actually his life lived in us. Love contains no fear—indeed fully-developed love expels every particle of fear, for fear always contains some of the torture of feeling guilty. This means that the man who lives in fear has not yet had his love perfected.

19-21 Yes, we love him because he first loved us. If a man says, "I love God" and hates his brother, he is a liar. For if he does not love the brother before his eyes how can he love the one beyond his sight? And in any case it is his explicit command that the one who loves God must love his brother too.

The center of Christianity is to love Jesus, who loves us by infinite love

Jesus promises us the communion of permanent and indissoluble love with God, his revealed presence, but with one insurmountable condition: that we love him by keeping his Word.

[ZENIT Staff](#)

Don Franco Follo

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1) We are not orphans.

This Sunday the liturgy continues the reading of Chapter 14 of the Gospel of John. The theme is love, as it appears from the beginning ("*if you love me*") (Jn 14,15) and the conclusion ("*whoever loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to Him* ") (Jn 14:21) of today's Gospel. The disciples, terrified by the real possibility that the Master could die, are comforted by Jesus who opens their hearts calling them "friends" and not "servants", giving them the Eucharist, and opening a new way, that of the love given to the world through the Cross. His Cross is the concrete revelation of God who loves to the full gift of self, and a sign of his unlimited presence in the world. On the Cross Christ does not fail but brings to the full the manifestation of His immense love: "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you*" (Jn 15: 12-18).

Jesus teaches to his disciples that his donated Love is the strength that allows not to be locked into a confined past, but to be open to a future perceived as the space of their loyalty to Him in a community and in the world. Only the disciple who accepts the reality of Jesus' death can open up to a new relationship with the Crucified Risen. The true "following" begins with Easter, an event that returns Jesus to the believer in a new way.

The Cross is not the end, but the beginning of a new path and of a relationship with Jesus Christ that has become indestructible. With his death and resurrection, He opens the "Way" leading to the "Truth" of the experience of God who "Life" in full.

On the evening of the first Holy Thursday, the scared Apostles are consoled by Christ who, in addition to proclaiming His love, tells them "I will not leave you orphans." That evening, Jesus seemed concerned not so much for himself as for his friends, who would know the depth of their weakness and the great pain of abandonment, and would look for something to comfort them. Jesus himself would be consoled by the presence of an Angel during his agony in Gethsemane, at the time when the desire to escape the crucifixion could also be born in him. "Father, if possible, keep away from me this cup, but not mine, but thy will be done." It is amazing how Jesus, who promised us the Consoler, wanted to be a 'man of all time': a man, every man, who knows the abyss of test and solitude. But in the end the design of realizing the great design of Love for us triumphed.

Even today Jesus repeats to us, "I will not leave you orphans." These words were, are and will always be a certainty for those who follow Him, yesterday, today and always. He said these words at the most difficult time of his earthly existence and, almost becoming the voice of our fear of being abandoned by everyone, to the point of crying from the cross: "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?" (Mt 26: 46). The Risen Christ tells us that

the One who loves is the home of the beloved: he brings him into his heart as his life. We have always been in God, who loves us with eternal love. If we love him, he is in us as we are in him.



2) If you love me ...

"If you love me you will keep my commands" (Jn 14:15). The words of this verse are repeated as a refrain in verses 21, 23 and 24. This is not an injunction (you must comply) but a revelation of goodness: "if "you love, you will enter a new world. Everything begins with the conjunction "if", a word filled with delicacy and respect: if you love me. "If": a starting point so humble, so free, so confident that helps us to understand that to observe the commandments of Christ is not to obey to an external law, but to live in love like Him. Just as the first Apostles of Christ and of the Gospel were moved by love lived as a law, we too, moved by the love of Christ, are moved to carry on the task of bringing to the world the love of God made flesh.

If we love Christ, He lives in our thoughts, actions and words and changes them. By doing so, we live his good, beautiful, and happy life. If we love Jesus and observe his commandment of love, not only we do not hurt, betray, steal, lie and kill, but we help, welcome and bless.

If it is true that today's theme is love, as I said at the beginning of these reflections, it is equally true that the dominant ideas are two. The first is that the most appropriate criterion to verify the reality of love for Christ is the obedience to his will, that is, the concrete observance of the commandments, which in Saint John are reduced to the commandment of fraternal love. The second one is that the practice of love is the place where Jesus reveals himself.

Love is so that, when we love someone, he or she is in our heart and in our mind and becomes the rule of our life. We know what he or she thinks, what he or she does, and we do what he or she does because we too love what he or she does. In conclusion, love is not only a feeling, but it also concerns all our being:

- It concerns knowledge: we know a person if we love him or her, and "love is the way to know God" (Pope Francis)
- It concerns will: loving is wanting the good of the other person; really wanting his or her good
- It concerns our actions: if it concerns intelligence and will, it concerns our actions; it is acting like the other person.

Therefore, love is a communion in the deep of our being, it is a union of intelligence, will, and action that makes us like Christ, the Son of God, with the same intelligence, the same will, and the same actions.



3) "My" Commandments.

In addition to the conjunction "if", I would like to draw attention to the possessive pronoun "mine". Saying, "If you keep the commandments" he says "my" commandments. It is as if to say: the Commandments are mine not because prescribed by me, but because they manifest what I am and your future. They summarize me and my whole life. If you love me, you will live like me and with me"

If we love Christ observing his commandments, He lives in us and changes our thoughts, our actions, our words into thoughts, actions and words of good. Then we participate to his freedom, his peace and to the joy of his living in love.

The testimony that what I am proposing is true, comes from the life of the consecrated Virgins. They show discretely but firmly that a life devoted to practicing his words makes factual the following of Christ as disciples (see

Mt 7:24) It is the observance of his commandments which makes concrete the love for Him and attracts the love of the Father (see Jn 14:21). Therefore, there is no love without obedience ("you are my friends, if you do what I command you"), but without love obedience is servile. We are reminded of that by Saint Ambrose who, speaking to the consecrated Virgins, wrote: "With what ties is Christ held? ... Not with the knots of ropes, but with the constraints of love and the affection of the soul" (*De virginitate*, 13.77). Finally, by taking to the letter the lesson of St. Paul "*More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him,*" (Phil 3: 8-9), these consecrated women live love with "detachment". The virginal love that they are called to witness to all the baptized, especially to the married couples, realizes the objective and actual good of self and of others if it maintains an attitude of distance. Only in detachment there is true possession in God, because the hands, rather than clinging to each other, are united in prayer. These folded hands open the heart of God who pours his merciful love over humanity.



Patristic Reading

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430)

Sermon 17

We have heard, brethren, while the Gospel was read, the Lord saying: "If ye love me, keep my commandments: and I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter [Paraclete], that He may abide with you forever; [even] the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye shall know Him; for He shall dwell with you, and shall be in you."¹ There are many points which might form the subject of inquiry in these few words of the Lord; but it were too much for us either to search into all that is here for the searching, or to find out all that we here search for. Nevertheless, as far as the Lord is pleased to grant us the power, and in proportion to our capacity and yours, attend to what we ought to say and you to hear, and receive, beloved, what we on our part are able to

give, and apply to Him for that wherein we fail. It is the Spirit, the Comforter, that Christ has promised to His apostles; but let us notice the way in which He gave the promise. "If ye love me," He says, "keep my commandments: and I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever: [even] the Spirit of truth." We have here, at all events, the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, whom the catholic faith acknowledges to be consubstantial and co-eternal with Father and Son: He it is of whom the apostle says, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given unto us."² How, then, doth the Lord say, "If ye love me, keep my commandments: and I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter;" when He saith so of the Holy Spirit, without [having] whom we can neither love God nor keep His commandments? How can we love so as to receive Him, without whom we cannot love at all? or how shall we keep the commandments so as to receive Him, without whom we have no power to keep them? Or can it be that the love wherewith we love Christ has a prior place within us, so that, by thus loving Christ and keeping His commandments, we become worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit, in order that the love, not of Christ, which had already preceded, but of God the Father, may be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given unto us? Such a thought is altogether wrong. For he who believes that he loveth the Son, and loveth not the Father, certainly loveth not the Son, but some figment of his own imagination. And besides, this is the apostolic declaration, "No one saith, Lord Jesus,³ but in the Holy Spirit:⁴ and who is it that calleth Him Lord Jesus but he that loveth Him, if he so call Him in the way the apostle intended to be understood? For many call Him so with their lips, but deny Him in their hearts and works; just as He saith of such, "For they profess that they know God, but works they deny Him."⁵ If it is by works He is denied, it is doubtless also by works that His name is truly invoked. "No one," therefore, "saith, Lord Jesus," in mind, in word, in deed, with the heart, the lips, the labor of the bands, -no one saith, Lord Jesus, but in the Holy

Spirit; and no one calls Him so but he that loveth, And accordingly the apostles were already calling Him Lord Jesus: and if they called Him so, in no way that implied a feigned utterance, with the mouth confessing, in heart and works denying Him; if they called Him so in all. truthfulness of soul, there can be no doubt they loved. And how, then, did they love, but in the Holy Spirit? And yet they are i commanded to love Him and keep His commandments, previous and in order to their receiving the Holy Spirit: and yet, without having that Spirit, they certainly could not love Him and keep His commandments.

2. We are therefore to understand that he who loves has already the Holy Spirit, and by what he has becomes worthy of a fuller possession, that by having the more he may love the more. Already, therefore, had the disciples that Holy Spirit whom the Lord promised, for without Him they could not call Him Lord; but they had Him not as yet in the way promised by the Lord. Accordingly they both had, and had Him not, inasmuch as they had Him not as yet to the same extent as He was afterwards to be possessed. They had Him, therefore, in a more limited sense: He was yet to be given them in an ampler measure. They had Him in a hidden way, they were yet to receive Him in a way that was manifest; for this present possession had also a bearing on that fuller gift of the Holy Spirit, that they might come to a conscious knowledge of what they had. It is in speaking of this gift that the apostle says: "Now we have received, not the spirit of this world, but the spirit which is of God, that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God."⁶ For that same manifest bestowal of the Holy Spirit the Lord made, not once, but on two separate occasions. For close on the back of His resurrection from the dead He breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit."⁷ And because He then gave [the Spirit], did He on that account fail in afterwards sending Him according to His promise? Or was it not the very same Spirit who was both then breathed upon them by Himself, and

afterwards sent by Him from heaven?⁸ And so, why that same giving on His part which took place publicly, also took place twice, is another question: for it may be that this twofold bestowal of His in a public way took place because of the two Commandments of love, that is, to our neighbor and to God, in order that love might be impressively intimated as pertaining to the Holy Spirit, And if any other reason is to be sought for, we cannot at present allow our discourse to be improperly prolonged by such an inquiry: provided, however, it be admitted that, without the Holy Spirit, we can neither love Christ nor keep His commandments; while the less experience we have of His presence, the less also can we do so; and the fuller our experience, so much the greater our ability. Accordingly, the promise is no vain one, either to him who has not [the Holy Spirit], or to him who has. For it is made to him who has not, in order that he may have; and to him who has, that he may have more abundantly. For were it not that He was possessed by some in smaller measure than by others, St. Elisha would not have said to St. Elijah, "Let the spirit that is in thee be in a twofold measure in me."⁹

3. But when Jn the Baptist said, "For God giveth not the Spirit by measure,"¹⁰ he was speaking exclusively of the Son of God, who received not the Spirit by measure; for in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead.¹¹ And no more is it independently of the grace of the Holy Spirit that the Mediator between God and men is the man Christ Jesus:¹² for with His own lips He tells us that the prophetic utterance had been fulfilled in Himself: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because He hath anointed me, and hath sent me to preach the gospel to the poor."¹³ For His being the Only-begotten, the equal of the Father, is not of grace, but of nature; but the assumption of human nature into the personal unity of the Only-begotten is not of nature, but of grace, as the Gospel acknowledges itself when it says, "And the child

grew, and waxed strong, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was in Him."14 But to others He is given by measure, -a measure ever enlarging until each has received his full complement up to the limits of his own perfection. As we are also reminded by the apostle, "Not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but to think soberly; according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."15 Nor is it the Spirit Himself that is divided, but the gifts bestowed by the Spirit: for there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.16

4. But when He says, "I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete," He intimates that He Himself is also a paraclete. For paraclete is in Latin called *advocatus* (advocate); and it is said of Christ, "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."17 But He said that the world could not receive the Holy Spirit, in much the same sense as it is also said, "The minding of the flesh is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can be;"18 just as if we were to say, Unrighteousness cannot be righteous. For in speaking in this passage of the world, He refers to those who love the world; and such a love is not of the Father.19 And thus the love of this world, which gives us enough to do to weaken and destroy its power within us, is in direct opposition to the love of God, which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us. "The world," therefore, "cannot receive Him, cause it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him." For worldly love possesseth not those invisible eyes, whereby, save in an invisible way, the Holy Spirit cannot be seen.

5. But ye," He adds, "shall know Him; for He shall dwell with you, and be in you." He will be in them, that He may dwell with them; He will not dwell with them to the end that He may be in them: for the being anywhere is prior to the dwelling there. But to prevent us from imagining that His words, "He shall dwell with you," were spoken in the same sense as that in which a guest

usually dwells with a man in a visible way, He explained what "He shall dwell with you" meant, when He added the words, "He shall be in you." He is seen, therefore, in an invisible way: nor can we have any knowledge of Him unless He be in us. For it is in a similar way that we come to see our conscience within us: for we see the face of another, but we cannot see our own; but it is our own conscience we see, not another's. And yet conscience is never anywhere but within us: but the Holy Spirit can be also apart from us, since He is given that He may also be in us. But we cannot see and know Him in the only way in which He may be seen and known, unless He be in us.

1 Augustin has *cognoscetis* for the second "know," and *scit* for that immediately preceding. The Greek text, however, has *ginwvskw* in both places, and in the *present* tense. He has also *manebit et in vobis erit*. The tense of *menei*, whether, *present* or *future*, depends simply on the place of the accent, *mevnei*, or *menei`*: while, as between the two readings *ejsti;n* and *e]stai*, the preponderance of Ms. authority seems in favor of the latter, although the *presentginwvskete* in the principal clause would be more naturally followed by an equally *proleptic* present in those which follow.-Tr.

2 ([Rm 5,5](#),

3 Or, "Jesus is Lord." The weight of authority is clearly in favor of the reading followed by Augustin-*levgei, Kuvrios jlhsou`*", giving the direct utterance of the speaker; and not the indirect accusative, *Kuvrion jlhsou`n*, followed by our English version.-Tr.

4 ([1Co 12,3](#)).

5 ([Tt 1,16](#),

6 ([1Co 2,12](#),

7 Chap. 20,22.

8 ([Ac 2,4](#),